

Don't Fall For Mr. Hart

C 3 - Commitment

Commitment

Naturally, we weren't invited to the funeral reception. Instead, we planned a little reception for the three of us in my and Emily's apartment. We sat on the carpet, drinking wine, eating pizza and snacks, and reminiscing about Julienne. She should have been here with us. This wasn't supposed to be like this. Julienne wanted to be a respectful businesswoman; I was supposed to work hard to get my Pulitzer Prize; and Bastian... Well, he was the only one on the right track to make his dreams come true.

Who would have thought that this skinny guy with always ruffled dark-blond hair and stormy-gray eyes would one day become a fine man? I couldn't help but stare at his bulging biceps as he folded his arms while talking to Emily. His shoulders grew broad and strong, and I could only imagine what the rest of his body under that tight black shirt looked like. Damn. I needed to snap out of it before the combination of wine and hormones made me do something incredibly stupid.

"I can't believe the audacity!" Emily exclaimed, pulling me out of my bewilderment. "So someone from the company killed her, called her crazy, and then they showed up to offer money to silence her family?!"

Bastian grimaced. "I wouldn't call it silencing the family..."

"Julienne's family was probably more than happy to receive money for her death," I interjected, explaining. "Abigail has always been a bitch who hated her own daughter, and Julienne's stepfather is an ass."

Emily's eyes at me widened. "And I'm supposed to believe that you're going to leave it like this?"

Her words painted a devilish grin on my face. "Not a chance."

"The Hart Global Corporation is a huge company. If their CEO and board are involved in illegal activity, the FBI will surely start an investigation. Unfortunately, I can't go to my boss without any kind of evidence," Bastian told Emily before glancing at me. "And that's when Charlie comes in."

"I can pretend that I want to write a big article about the company. I will talk to the employees and even interview CEO Hart," I claimed with confidence. "Then I plan to use my charm and get a few employees to talk outside the office. We would drink, and they would share. I will find dirt in no time."

Emily blinked her eyes at me and gave me a dry smile. "Good luck with that," she said and downed her glass.

I frowned. "That sounded... discouraging."

She sighed and looked at me with pity in her eyes. "Charlie, I love you, and I love your enthusiasm, but I think you've forgotten a few important details." She poured herself more wine. "Your super-duper article... where would you publish it?" She smirked and waved her long lashes. "Let me remind you that you are currently unemployed, and even if you had a job as a journalist, you would have to work for the Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, or New York Times, so the CEO and others would even consider letting you into their company."

Bastian cleared his throat. "I could get her a fake press ID. I know a guy—"

"This won't work." Emily crossed her arms and frowned at us. "Even my boss would figure out that something was wrong, and he would do it in less than fifteen seconds."

Emily worked for Bailey & Sons Law Firm. The company wasn't big, but it still handled a few large cases back in the day. Mr. Joseph Bailey, Emily's boss, was a gray-haired, highly knowledgeable gentleman, although he was no longer as bright as he used to be... If Emily claimed that her boss could see through our plan, then we wouldn't stand a chance against someone like Alexander Hart.

"Besides," Emily continued, dragging our brilliant idea through the mud. "None of the employees is going to talk to you in private, and you want to know why? Because they would not only lose their jobs if they did. They would also suffer the consequences of violating their confidentiality clauses. And believe me, they all signed it along with their contracts."

I groaned in frustration and refilled Bastian's glass and mine. "So what else can I do?"

Emily shrugged, gulping the remaining wine in her glass. "Get a job there."

"What?" I all but snorted.

"Work undercover," Emily stated casually. "You are smart. I'm sure you could land a job at Hart Corp."

I huffed. "This is ridiculous!"

"No, it might actually be a brilliant idea," Bastian agreed with Emily, and my jaw dropped to the floor. "Think about it, Charlie. This could be the only way to get the information we need."

"Yes! Think about it: you will be as close to the source as possible!" Emily convinced.

"She is right!" Bastian was equally enthusiastic. "This will be perfect! You know the drill, and damn, you even know how to shoot!"

"Do you think I will need to kill someone to get the information?!" I nearly shrieked.

He waved his hand dismissively. "I was talking about self-defense." Then he looked at Emily and grinned. "By the way, you have great ideas when you're drunk."

Emily snickered, playing with her glass. "Thank you, Bastian." She winked at him while twirling her hair around her fingers, making me roll my eyes. Then she grabbed her phone and typed something. A minute later, a wide grin spread across her lips. "The Hart Global Corporation is currently looking for the CEO's secretary." She looked at me with a wicked gleam in her eye. "Isn't it a wonderful opportunity?"

My eyes shifted from her to Bastian. Both of them had the same hopeful gaze on me. It didn't help that I actually agreed that it was the best opportunity we could have to find out what happened. My hands dropped to my sides. "I hate you guys," I grumbled.

"Does it mean that you're going to do it?" Emily giggled.

I sighed. "Yes, I will apply for that damn job."

She gave me one of her ear-stabbing happy screams and clapped her hands. I rolled my eyes and looked at my empty glass.

"I will pour you more wine," Bastian suddenly offered. "I will help you with preparations."

"So will I!" Emily grinned.

I looked at them and closed my eyes. "I'm so going to regret this."

The preparations for "Operation Hart" started almost immediately, and the next thing I knew, I was sitting in front of my laptop and digging through tons of data essential for me to get the job.

The Hard Global Corporation was one of the world's largest companies selling security and monitoring systems, but not a lot of people knew that the company was also selling weapons and military equipment, and it was the latter that brought most of the profit. The founder and CEO of the company was Alexander Hart, a sixty-eight-year-old business genius and potentially evil mastermind who might have been at least partially responsible for Julienne's death.

I spent hours reading Hart Global's financial reports and all the articles about their scientists' and engineers' achievements. In the meantime, Bastian left to meet his mysterious colleague.

"I will get you something that will help in your job interview," he said with a mischievous grin before walking out the door.

"Yeah, sure," I remember responding absentmindedly, too focused on reading reports to care what he meant.

It was ten in the morning. I was finishing my third coffee when Emily finally returned after doing her part of the so-called research. "I'm back!" she sing-songed, kicking the door shut behind her. I raised my head, taking my eyes off the computer screen. She was grinning like a child who had just come back from a candy shop while holding thirty or more volumes of magazines and tabloids.

"Take a break from that boring stuff," she ordered, throwing everything she had on the carpet. "We have real work to do!" With that announcement, she started flipping through the pages and marking every article concerning CEO Hart and Hart Global Corporation.

I sighed and sat beside her. Then I reluctantly took the first magazine and read the caption. "Seriously?" I pointed at Alexander Hart's picture from a charity gala. "Why would I care about how the old man parties? Should I memorize the colors of his suits, or what kinds of drinks he likes?"

Emily rolled her eyes. "Charlie, that man has to like you. How can he trust you otherwise?"

I frowned. "I need to impress him, and that guy is a genius. I think I'm going to bet on knowledge."

She sent me a meaningful stare. "You need to know your enemy; know his weaknesses. No offense, Charlie, but I don't think you can outsmart the guy. Reading the protocols and reports, you'll see only the clean and pretty numbers, whereas here"—she smirked and pointed at the tabloids—"you'll find the dirt."

I shook my head and sighed. As much as I hated to admit it, I needed every leverage I could get, even if I had to dig through the trash-like papers. I grabbed one of the magazines and started going through the colorful pages. "I can't believe you're making me do this," I grunted, but then I froze, fixing my eyes on a photo of a familiar black-haired man wearing a perfectly tailored dark-gray suit.

"Charlie, stop drooling." Emily snorted, pulling me out of my daze.

"Emily... That's the guy I saw with Angelica Butterfly," I told her, my voice all but breathless.

"No way!" She laughed, locking her eyes on the picture I pointed to. "Now, this is one hell of a coincidence, don't you think?"

I narrowed my eyes at her. "What do you mean?"

Her eyebrows rose. "Seriously? You don't know who he is?" I shook my head, and she rolled her eyes. "No wonder you got fired from Bombshell News." She chuckled before clearing her throat. "So, you saw a gorgeous, half-naked man in Angelica's mansion. Then you saw the same guy at Julianne's funeral, and now you are telling me that this is the guy you saw?" Emily tapped her finger on the picture, demanding my confirmation. I nodded, and mischief filled her entire face. "Then perhaps you'll see him again while working for Hart Global Corporation because this is Aiden Hart, your future boss's youngest son."